What Are Walls For? Color, Form And Experience

By KEVIN WOODWARD
Sentinel Staff Writer

Murals are big in Santa Cruz County.

"It's happening all over California. It's really just coming to Santa Cruz and I think it's great. What are walls for, if not for painting?" asks local artist Eduardo Carrillo.

Providing positive landmarks, the dozens of local murals provide visual relief from the sterility and blandness of today's modern invironment. Murals add color, form and a personal experience for all who encounter them.

"Scale and location make a big difference. If something is outside within the so-called normal world, it has a shock value to it. A mural is nothing more than a cure, not only for the artist, but for the viewer, too," said Carrillo, an associate professor of arts and humanities at UCSC, where he has taught mural painting classes since 1972.

Originally tracing its beginnings from man's earliest cave scratchings, murals were once the possessions of only the richest and most powerful emperors and kings. Refining itself through the ancient Roman frescoes and Aztec pyramid paintings, mural form has progressed through the centuries to the current illusionistic style so popular with local artists.

Traditionally, murals have mirrored their cultures and have almost always provided a historical perspective for later study. Santa Cruz' own wall paintings are no exceptions.

"Murals for me are more culture and conciousness related," Carrillo said. "I find other local artists envolved with environmental and social ideas, but at the same time there are others who's work is more decorative. The muse starts calling and you answer in your work."

Kent Karp, a local muralist responsible for half a dozen local paintings, has done both decorative and educational pieces. Karp was recently honored with the prestigious SCOPE (Santa Cruz Organization for the Promotion of Euthentics) award for his mural on the Lenz Artists Supply building, a mural which he has changed 12 times in the past year and a half.

"It's one thing to put a strong political thing on a building that would relate to one segment of society, but I feel it's even better to paint something that's beautiful and that everyone can enjoy," Karp said.

Karp and partner Bill Burita recently teammed up to paint the Upper Crust Pizza mural on Mission Street. The painting is currently the center of a legal battle due to it's alleged violation of the city sign ordinance.

The mural uses a historical perspective that illustrates some of Santa Cruz' most famous structures from the Old Mission in 1972 through to the present.

"It was an educational experience for us, too," said Burita. "We learned a lot about the history of Santa Cruz just to be able to do the mural. What is basically important to us, though, is providing some kind of benefit for the community."

Carrillo, himself, has been involved with legal problems concerning a painting of his located in the Palomar Arcade off the mall. The mural, entitled "Birth, Death and Ressurection," was good enough to help earn a $7,500 grant from the National Endowment for the Arts, but did not impress the arcade management, which painted over the two-year-old work of art last February.

The mural took Carrillo more than six months to paint and the time it took is indicative of the hard work involved with wall painting.

"It takes a lot of energy to do a mural, it's very tiring. It is also more of a challenge than easel painting. There is a lot more work involved and most of it is hard work," Carrillo said.

In addition, muralists have to contend with such varied problems as the wind and rain, difficult lighting, seagull droppings. Working conditions that can be described as less than ideal.

"You really have to cross each bridge when you come to it. One of our biggest problems is scaffolding. You have to put them up just right and then not forget where you are. You can't exactly take a step back to look at your work," Karp explained.

Much of the mural art in Santa Cruz County is the result of the work of Watsonvill's Tortuga Patrol, a group of Chicano artists who have been active in the past four years. Working with grants from the Community Action Board, CETA, California Arts Council and Revenue Sharing, the Tortuga Patrol is led by co-founders Ralph D'Oliveira and Ray Romo.

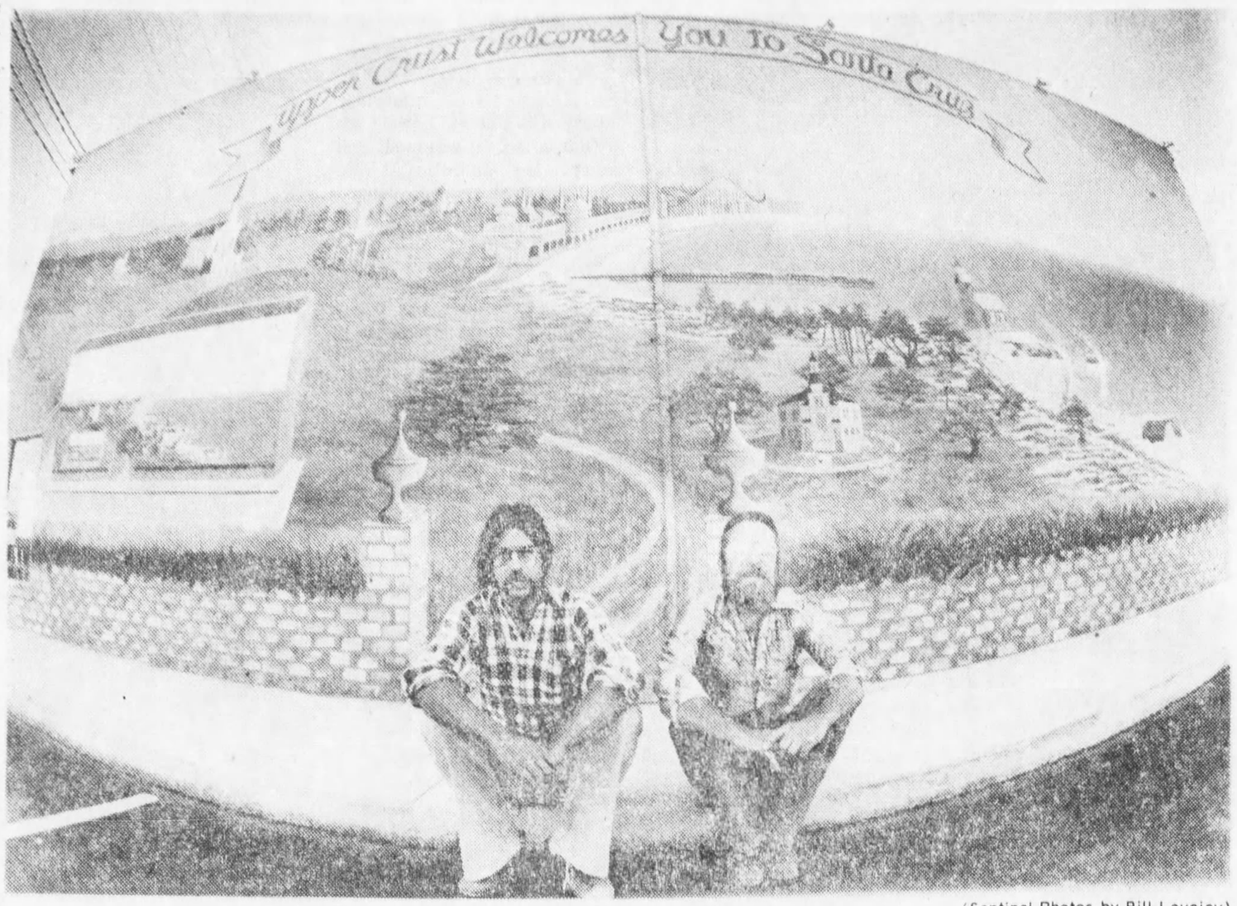
"Santa Cruz County murals really began in Watsonville," Carrillo said. "Mural painting is a tradition that has come down from some of the early Mexican painters, but also from older times, from the Mayans and Aztecs."

Carrillo has recently completed an 8-by-40 foot ceramic mural entitled "Plazita del Dolores," that will appear accross from the Los Angeles train station. It depicts the Mexican independence uprising of Sept. 15, 1810, which was led by Father Hidalgo, a Catholic priest. The mural is an example of the cultural themes Carrillo and other Hispanic artists use to express themselves through their art.

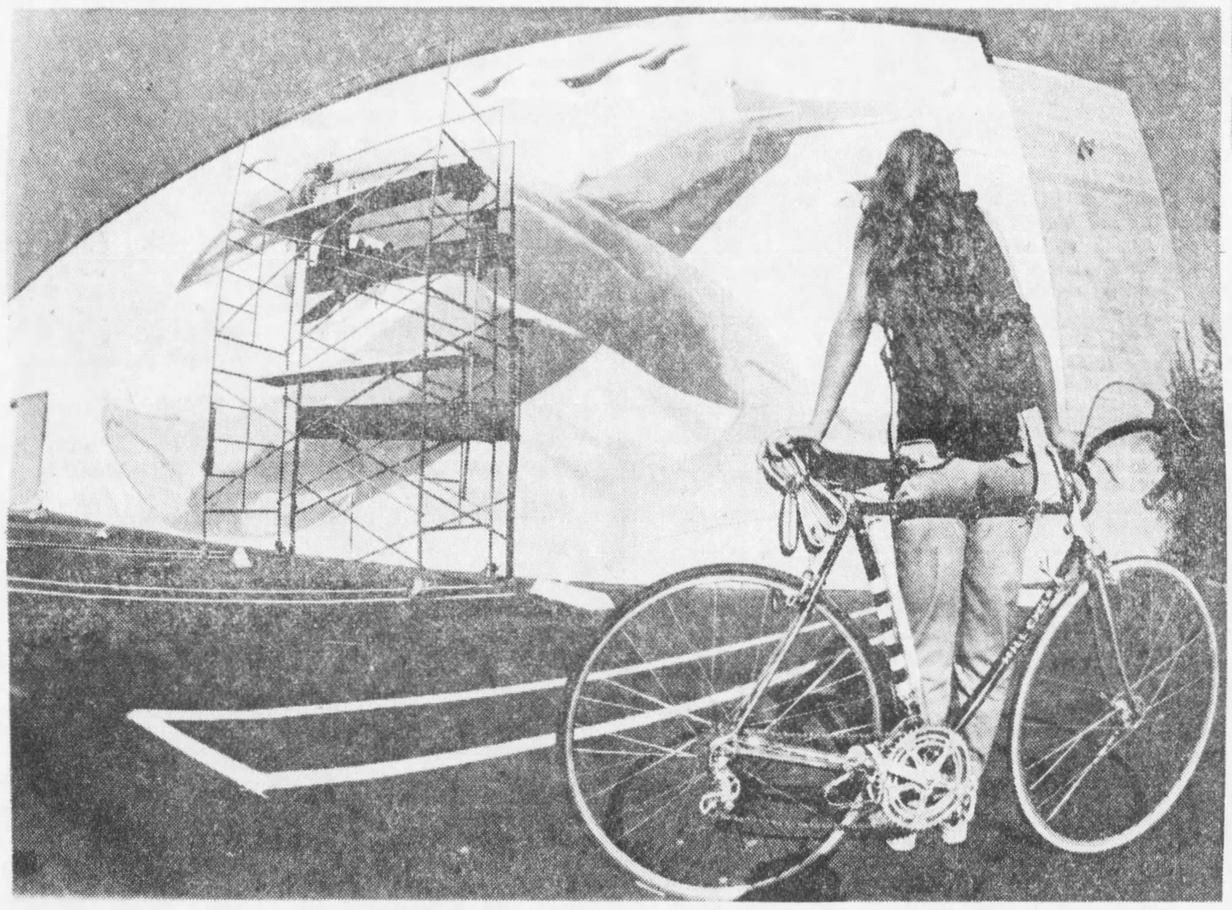
"My own cultural roots originally got me into murals and I feel that it's just as important to be a teacher as an artist," Carrillo said. "The murals contain important information. They are not just designs, they contain information important to survival."



Eduardo Caeerillo of UCSC with "Plazita del Dolores"



Bill Burita, left, and Kent Karp at Upper Crust mural (Sentinel Photos by Bill Lovejoy)



Daniel Burgevin finishes Greenpeace mural at 41st Avenue Playhouse

A Guide To Area Murals

Here is a partial list of the murals available to the public in Santa Cruz County:

Watsonville
— Watsonville International Senior Citizens Center (Tortuga Patrol).
— Youth Employment Services Center (Tortuga Patrol).
— Rolling Hills Junior High (Tortuga Patrol).
— Radcliff Elementary School (Carmen Leon).
— Mona Lisa Cafe (Leon, Alex Espinosa, Vicki Petrovich).

UCSC
— Applied Sciences Building.
— Communications Center.
— College V (Douglas McCellan, Hardy Hansan).
— Oakes College (3).
— Thiemann Labs (Richard Trigeros).

Santa Cruz
— Tampico Kitchen (Tortuga Patrol).
— Odessey Records (Jeff McCormick).
— Lenz Artists Supply (Karp).
— Greenpeace - Mission (Daniel Burgevin).
— Greenpeace - 41st Avenue Playhouse (Burgevin).
— Pacific Trading Company (David Dalton).
— Freeline Surf Shop (Dalston).
— Scribner's Park Wall (Guadalupanos de Santa Cruz).
— Frozen Yogurt Shop - Palomar Arcade (Karp).
— Shooting Gallery - Boardwalk (Karp).
— Upper Crust Pizza (Karp, Bill Burita).
— Cooper House (James McFarlin).
— Live Oak School (Tortuga Patrol).
— Branciforte Junior High (Tortuga Patrol).
— Catalyst (2) (Petrovich, Ernie Valles).

Capitola
— Capitola Elementary School (Steve Howes).

Soquel
— Cabrillo College Economic Opportunities Center (Tortuga Patrol).
— Santa Cruz Garden School (Tortuga Patrol).

Aptos
— Del Mar School (McCormick).

Freedom
— Lamat Restaurant (Tortuga Patrol).

Boulder Creek
— Peach Cottage (Karp, Burita).

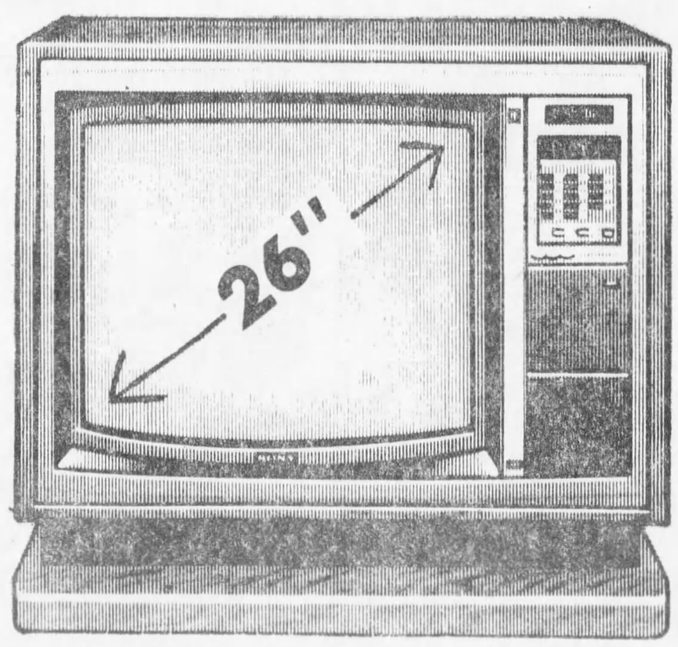
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